

PISHKUN, WILLOW CREEK, BENTON LAKE  
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES

January 1 - April 30, 1958

REFUGE PERSONNEL

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Charlo, Montana

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Narrative Report

January 1 - April 30, 1958

I. GENERAL

Two trips were made to these areas during the period. The first trip in March was to acquaint the present manager with the areas and to meet prominent people. Considerable snow was on the ground and part of Benton Lake was the only refuge observed. Both Pishkun and Willow Creek were inaccessible. On the second trip, in April, all three areas were visited and the range inspected, waterfowl counts made, and some maintenance done on fencelines, boundary markers and recognition signs.

- A. Weather Conditions. The following table will indicate the general weather conditions, in the vicinity of these three refuges, for the period. This data was obtained from the weather bureau station at Choteau, Montana.

<u>1958</u>	<u>Snowfall</u>	<u>Precipitation</u>	<u>Max. Temp.</u>	<u>Min. Temp.</u>
January	8.0	.30	65	03
February	13.0	.74	65	-12
March	18.10	.86	53	-12
April	0.0	1.02	72	21
Total	39.10	2.92	Extremes	-12

- B. Habitat Conditions.

1. Water. The water conditions are rather poor this year, as compared to previous years, in Willow Creek and Pishkun reservoirs. Snowfall, at higher elevations, has been heavy though, and an ample supply of water is predicted for the season. The only water, in Benton Lake, is in the ditch, running along the West and North end of the refuge and in two stock watering ponds.

The following tables will indicate the reservoir elevations for the period for this and the past several years, for Pishkun and Willow Creek reservoirs:

PISHKUN

<u>End of:</u>	<u>1958</u>	<u>1957</u>	<u>1956</u>	<u>1955</u>	<u>1954</u>
January	4356.5	4360.3	4360.0	4362.5	4363.2
February	4356.1	4359.9	4360.0	4362.5	4363.1
March	4355.9	4359.9	4359.7	4362.0	4363.0
April	4360.3	4361.9	4365.4	4362.5	4363.0

Crest of spillway - 4374.0. Bottom of outlet - 4342.0

## WILLOW CREEK

End of:	1958	1957	1956	1955	1954
January	4132.0	4132.5	4138.0	4136.2	4137.1
February	4132.6	4135.6	4138.0	4136.5	4137.8
March	4133.3	4136.0	4139.1	4137.0	4138.2
April	4136.0	4136.4	4139.1	4137.5	4138.6

Crest of spillway - 4142.0. Bottom of outlet - 4085.0

2. Food and Cover. Abundant food appears available for waterfowl on all three areas. This consists mostly of submerged aquatic plants and fresh water shrimp. Very little emergent vegetation was found on these trips except for a few potholes on Willow Creek, containing Isoetes and in the Willow Creek nesting area, where considerable bullrush and spike rush was found. Other food is found in surrounding grain fields.

The general condition of the range appears good, on all of the areas. This is especially true on both Willow Creek and Pishkun refuges, where a considerable amount of new, desirable range plants can be seen emerging. Under the present grazing system, the ranges are sure to show additional improvement. Prominent range plants on both areas include: Western Wheatgrass, Bluebunch Wheatgrass, Needle and Threadgrass, Threadleaf Sedge, Blue Gramma, Junegrass, Sandburg Bluegrass, and Saltgrass. Other plants present include: Horsebrush, Squawbush, Juncus, Fringed Sage, Douglas Flax, Gunweed, and Snowberry.

The condition of the Benton Lake range is generally good, with the exception of a few alkali spots that are bare. Much of the low lying ground is covered with thick patches of grass of the Barley tribe, and does not seem palatable to cattle, as it is left relatively untouched.

## II. WILDLIFE

Approximately 20 Canada Geese and 100 ducks were observed on Pishkun Refuge. Other migratory birds present included: Common Loon, Double-crested Cormorant, Red-breasted, Hooded and Common mergansers, Pied-billed and Holboell's grebes. More birds might have been seen, but visibility was limited due to the development of a strong wind and heavy snowfall, during the visit.

Willow Creek yielded approximately 60 Canada Geese, 25 Snow Geese, and 250 ducks. 1500 Coot were present. Other waterfowl included: Double-crested Cormorant, Common Loon, Red-breasted and Hooded mergansers, and Pied-billed Grebe. 10 Killdeer were present.

Benton Lake had approximately 500 ducks on the waterholes and in the ditches. Prominent among them were Mallard, Pintail, Green-winged Teal, and American Widgeon.

### III. REFUGE DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE

1. Fence repairs were made on the nesting area at Willow Creek.
2. Two recognition signs, that had been broken off by the wind, were brought back to Ninepipe for refinishing.
3. Damaged boundary markers were replaced with new markers at Benton Lake.
4. The location of one 21A sign was changed, at Benton Lake, and two refinished signs were hung. This was done by the use of interlocking eyebolts, to allow the signs to swing in the wind without breaking the hangers.

### IV. RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Permits were issued to four persons, during the period, for grazing cattle on units 2, 3, 4, and 5G, on Benton Lake Refuge, for a total of not to exceed 782 AUM's, during the year January 1 to December 31, 1958. One permit was issued for farming 40 acres on unit 1A.

### V. FIELD INVESTIGATION AND APPLIED RESEARCH

The waterfowl census was discussed under section II.

### VI. PUBLIC RELATIONS

The refuge manager, in company with Mr. John Schwartz, met and talked to prominent sportsmen, civic leaders, State Game Department officials, and permittees, during the visits to the three refuges. Two visits were made to the Fairfield Irrigation District, and discussions held with the Superintendent, Mr. George Ebner. A meeting of the Cascade County Wildlife Association was attended during the period.

### V. OTHER ITEMS

- A. Items of Interest. The long awaited plans for development of a water supply for Benton Lake have finally materialized. Congressional approval for the project has been given and funds allotted. Approval for the use of the water from Muddy Creek, near Power, Montana by the Irrigation District has been granted. At the end

of the period, bids were out for construction of an impoundment and pump house on Muddy Creek. These bids are to be opened on May 8, and the contract let soon thereafter. Terms call for completion of this portion of the project six months after start.

B. Signature.

Submitted by,

May 16, 1958

Robert J. Houser  
Robert J. Houser, Refuge Manager

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
John E. Schwartz, Refuge Manager

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Regional Director  
Fish and Wildlife Service  
Region One, Portland, Oregon